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(54) **AUTOMATIC DETERMINATION OF
REGULARIZATION FACTOR FOR
ITERATIVE IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION
WITH REGULARIZATION AND/OR IMAGE
DE-NOISING**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.**

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2207/20004 (2013.01)

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G06T 2211/436; **G06T 5/00**; **G06T 5/002**;
G06T 7/0044; **A61B 6/032**; **A61B 6/037**;
A61B 5/055; **G01N 2223/419**; **G01N 23/046**
See application file for complete search history.

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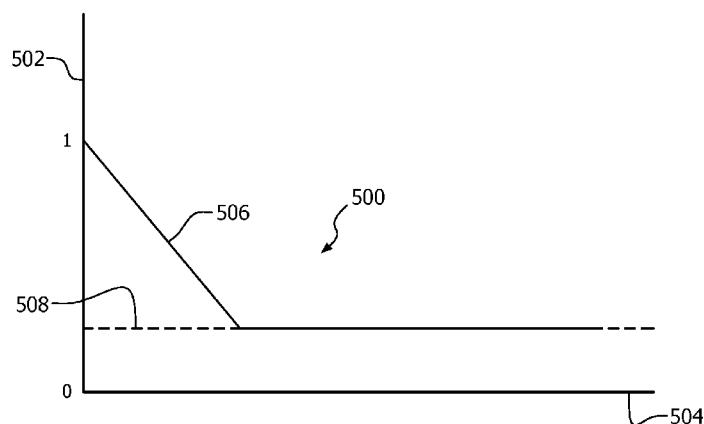
(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Jingge Wu

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A processing component (122) processes images based on an
iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization and/or
de-noising algorithm. The processing component includes a
set point determiner (224) that determines a quality set point
(216) between predetermined lower and upper quality bounds
(226) based on a quality variable (228) indicative of an image
quality of interest. The processing component further
includes a comparator (214) that compares, each processing
iteration, a quality metric of a current generated image with
the quality set point and generates a difference value indica-
tive of a difference between the quality metric and the quality
set point. The processing component further includes a regu-
larization factor updater (220) that generates an updated regu-
larization factor for a next processing iteration based on a
current value (222) of the regularization factor and at least the
quality metric in response to the difference value indicating
that the quality metric is outside of a predetermined range
about the quality set point.

20 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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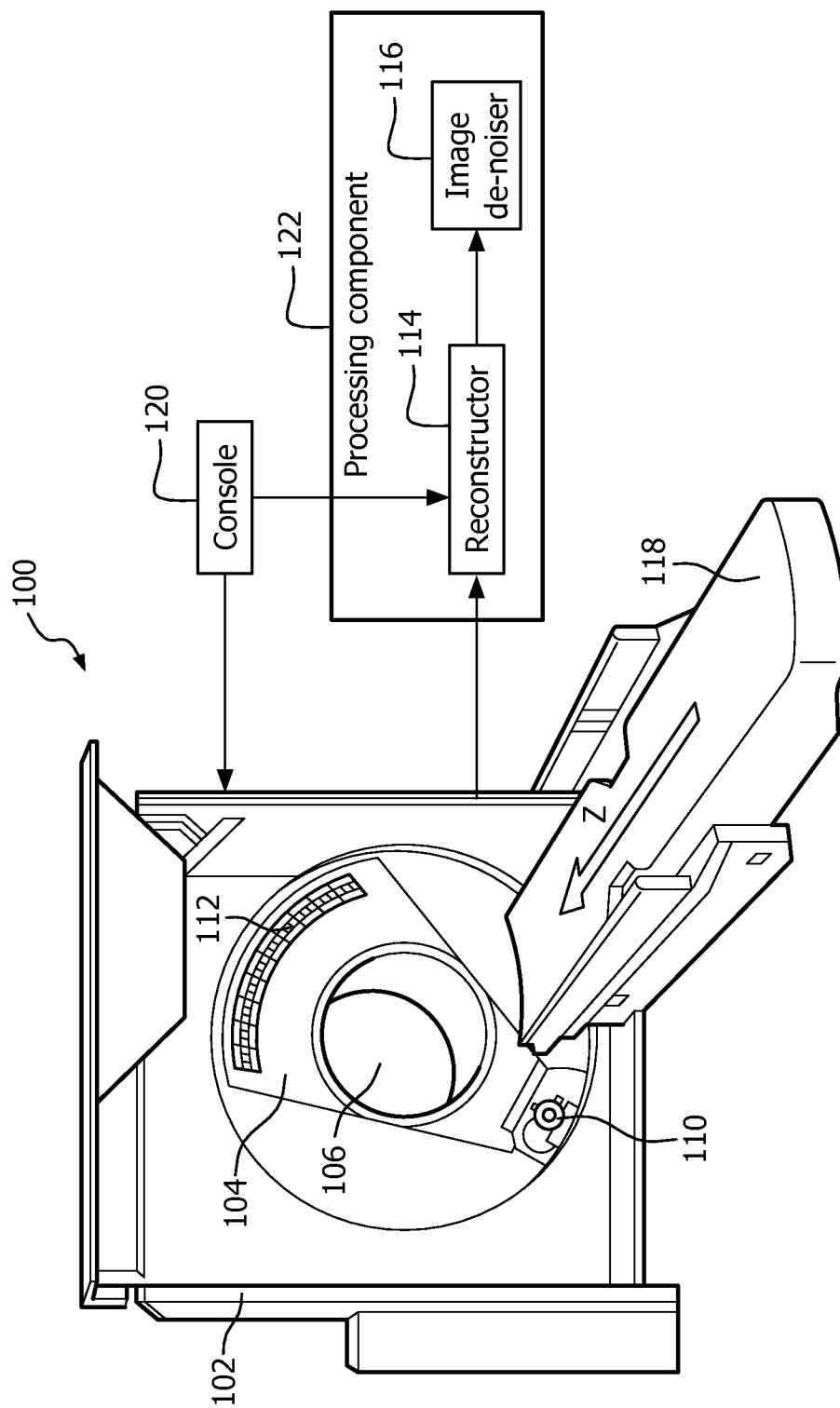


FIG. 1

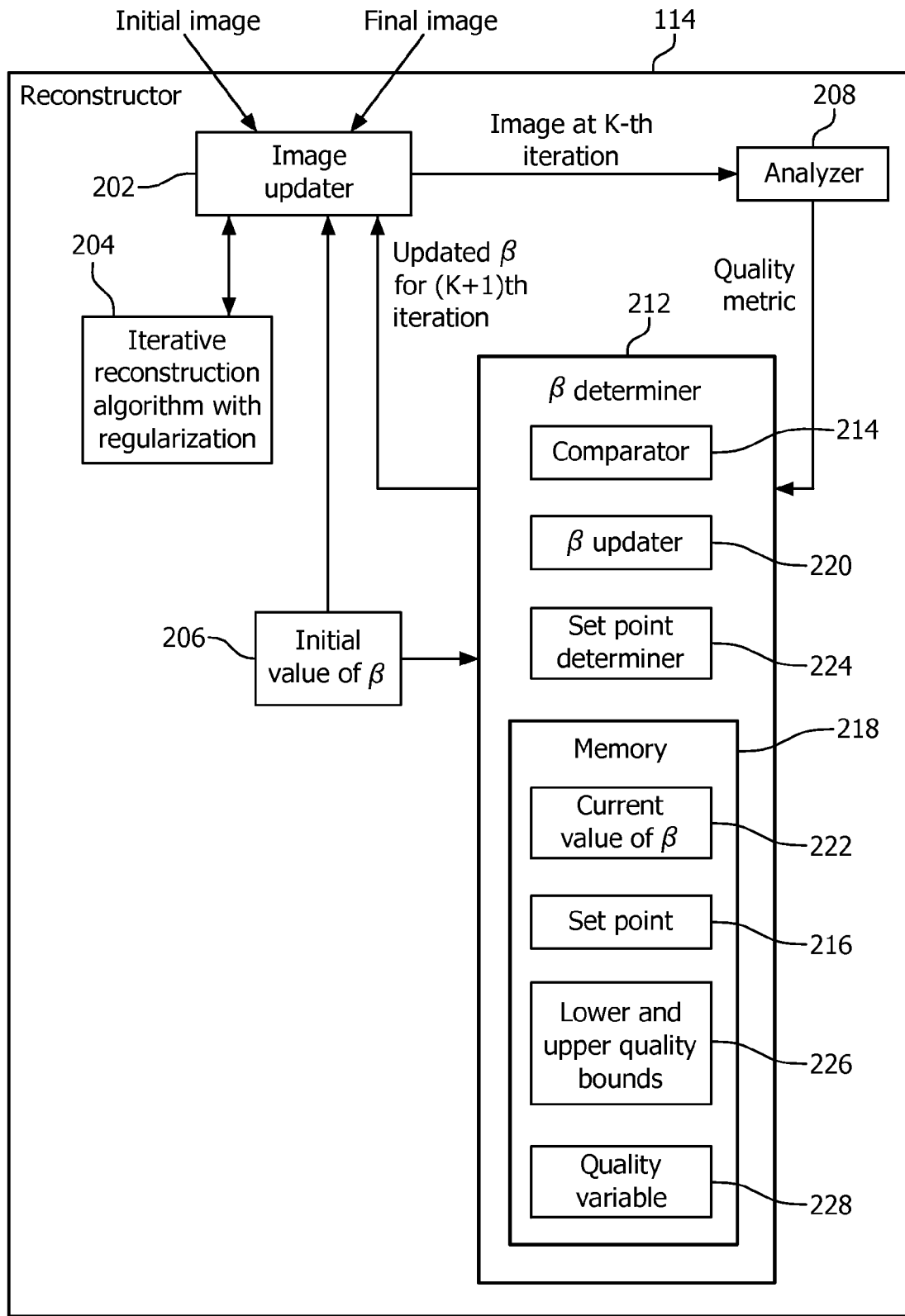


FIG. 2

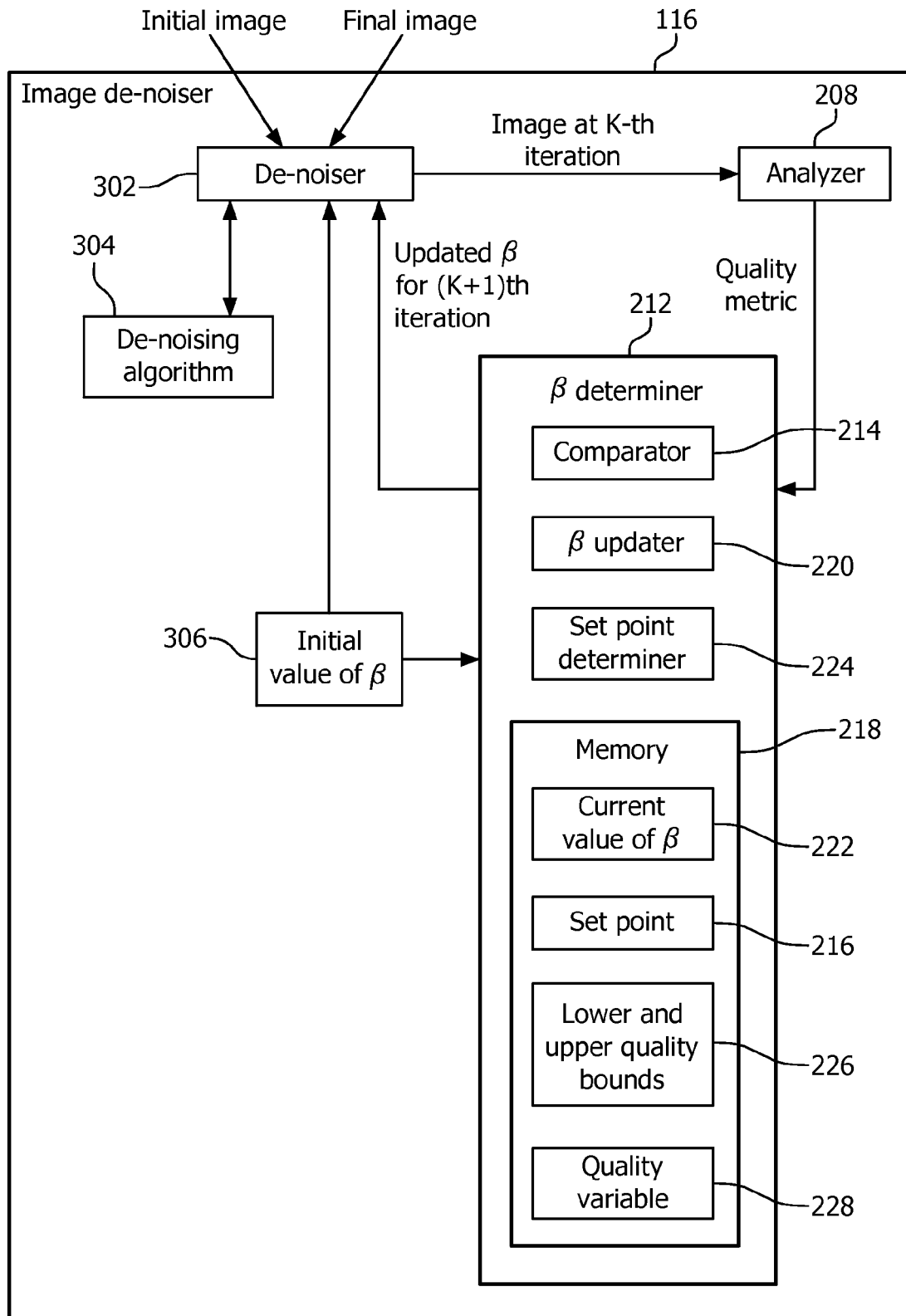


FIG. 3

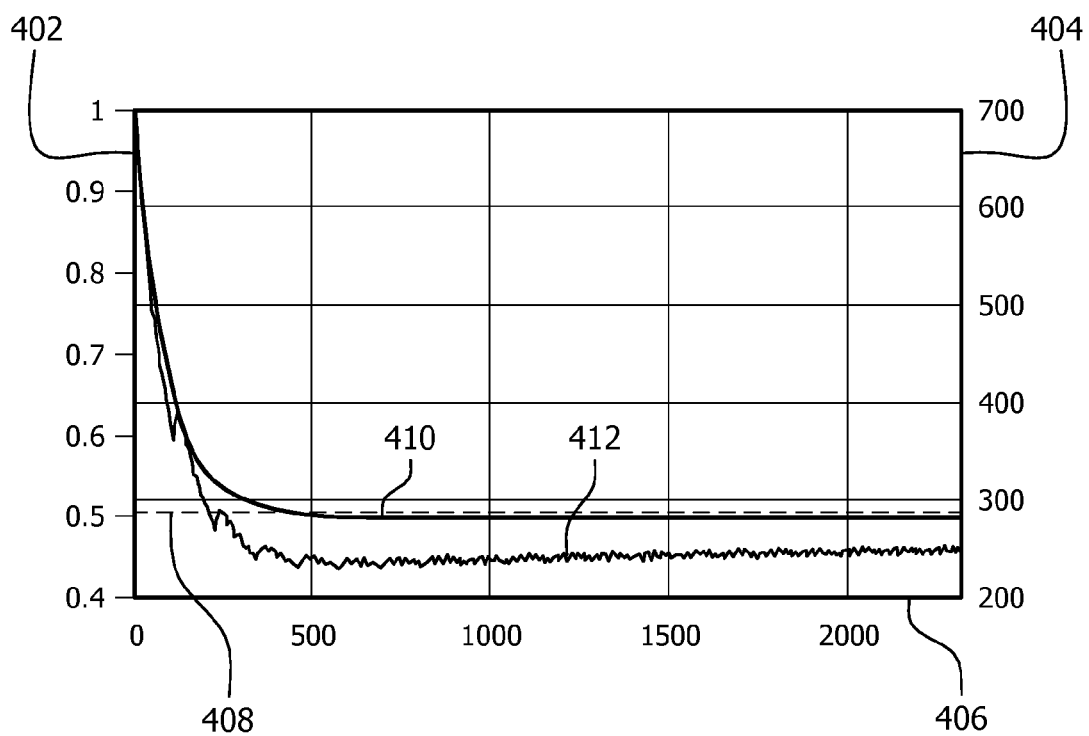


FIG. 4

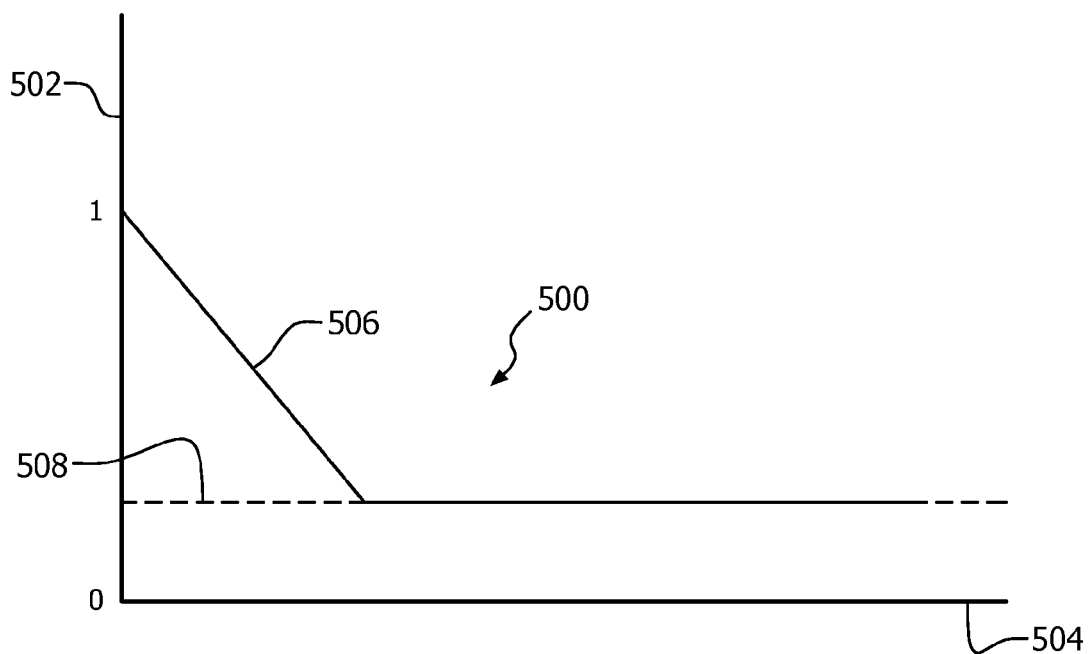


FIG. 5

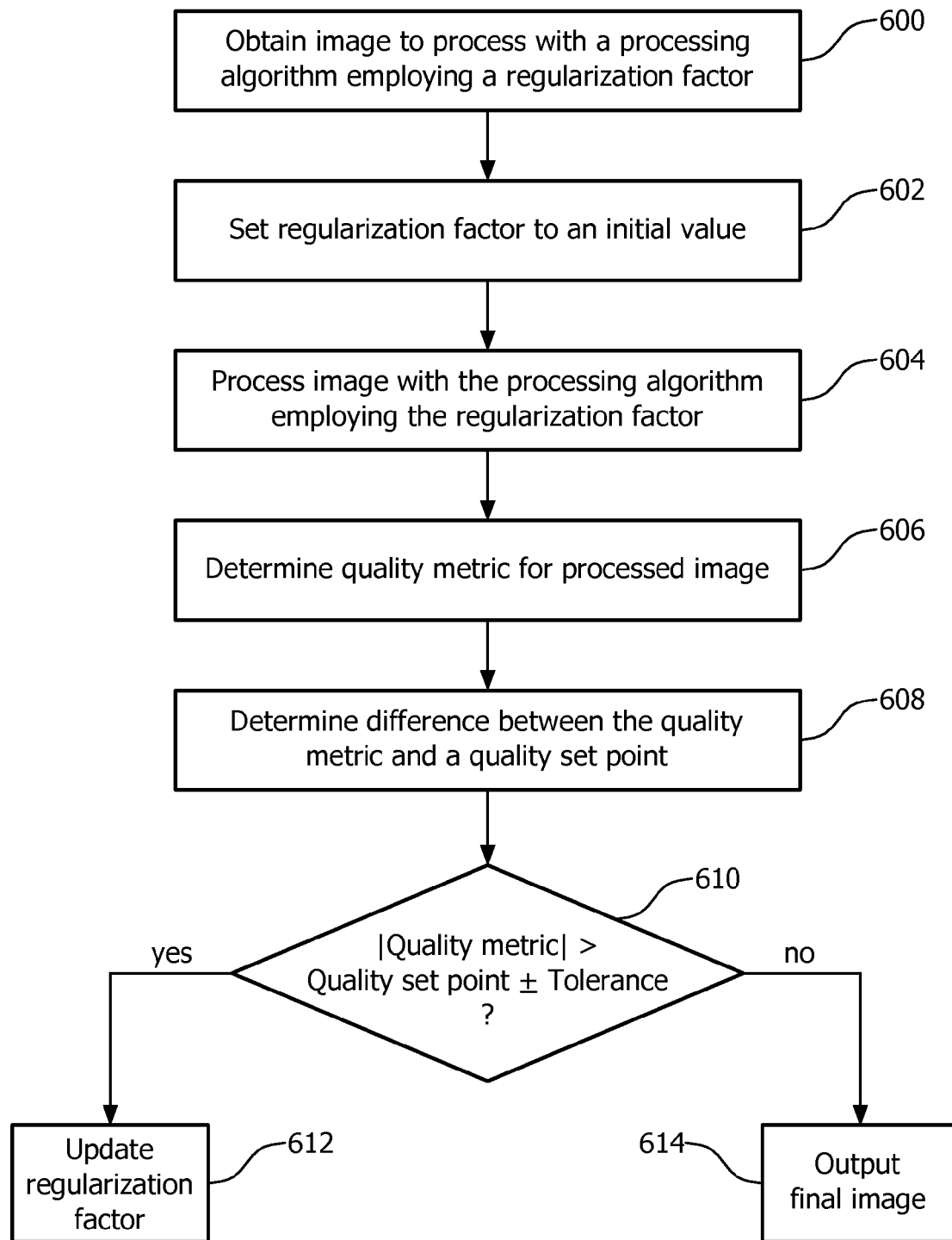


FIG. 6

AUTOMATIC DETERMINATION OF REGULARIZATION FACTOR FOR ITERATIVE IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION WITH REGULARIZATION AND/OR IMAGE DE-NOISING

CROSS-REFERENCE TO PRIOR APPLICATIONS

This application is the U.S. National Phase application under 35 U.S.C. §371 of International Application No. PCT/IB2012/056929, filed on Dec. 4, 2012, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/569,835, filed on Dec. 13, 2011. These applications are hereby incorporated by reference herein.

The following generally relates to iterative image reconstruction with regularization and/or image de-noising and finds particular application to computed tomography (CT), and is also amenable to other imaging modalities.

A CT scanner includes an x-ray tube mounted on a rotatable gantry that rotates around an examination region about a z-axis. A detector array subtends an angular arc opposite the examination region from the x-ray tube. The x-ray tube emits radiation that traverses the examination region. The detector array detects radiation that traverses the examination region and generates projection data indicative thereof. A reconstructor reconstructs, using an iterative or non-iterative reconstruction algorithm, the projection data, generating images indicative of the examination region. The noise level of the images depends on various imaging parameters and can be reduced through de-noising algorithms.

Iterative image reconstruction with regularization and/or image de-noising algorithms have been formulated through a cost function with a data fidelity term and a regularization term. The latter term is multiplied by a regularization factor β , and then both terms are added to determine a total cost, which is minimized. A generic cost function can be expressed as: $\text{Cost}(f) = F(f) + \beta R(f)$, where f represents an image, $F(f)$ represents the data fidelity term, $R(f)$ represents the regularization term, and β is a free parameter and represents the regularization factor that controls the strength of the regularization. For iterative reconstruction with regularization, the data fidelity term compares the forward projected image with the measured projections, optionally including a noise model on the projection. For de-noising, the data fidelity term can be the difference with the initial, noisy image. Likewise, a noise model can be included.

Generally, the regularization factor β is manually determined. However, β tends to be image and dataset dependent. Therefore, β has to be manually determined for each different image and/or dataset. This has been achieved by running several iterations with different β 's (in parallel or series) and selecting the β that satisfies predetermined criteria. Unfortunately, this process can be computational and time intensive. For example, given a typical iteration takes two (2) to three (3) hours and ten (10) or more iterations may be ran before reaching a desirable final image, determining β for a particular image may take twenty (20) or more hours.

Aspects described herein address the above-referenced problems and others.

In one aspect, a processing component processes images based on an iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization and/or de-noising algorithm. The processing component includes a set point determiner that determines a quality set point between predetermined lower and upper quality bounds based on a quality variable indicative of an image quality of interest. The processing component further includes a comparator that compares, each processing iteration,

a quality metric of a current generated image with the quality set point and generates a difference value indicative of a difference between the quality metric and the quality set point. The processing component further includes a regularization factor updater that generates an updated regularization factor for a next processing iteration based on a current value of the regularization factor and at least the quality metric in response to the difference value indicating that the quality metric is outside of a predetermined range about the quality set point.

In another aspect, a method includes processing an initial image during a first processing iteration using an algorithm, which employs regularization, and an initial regularization factor, and generating a first image. The method further includes determining a first quality metric of the first image. The method further includes comparing the first quality metric of the first image with a quality set point and determining a difference value there between. The method further includes generating an updated regularization factor for a subsequent processing iteration of the image in response to the first quality metric being outside of a predetermined range about the quality set point. The updated regularization factor is generated based on the initial regularization factor and the first quality metric, and the updated regularization factor is used to process the first image during the subsequent processing iteration and generate a subsequent image.

In another aspect, a processing component includes a component that processes an image using an iterative algorithm employing regularization and generates an image, wherein the iterative algorithm at least includes a regularization term multiplied by a regularization factor. The processing component further includes an analyzer that generates a quality metric after each processing iteration for a respective generated image. The processing component further includes a regularization factor determiner that automatically generates an updated regularization factor for a next processing iteration by the component based on a quality metric of a generated image of a current processing iteration and a predetermined quality set point for the generated image.

The invention may take form in various components and arrangements of components, and in various steps and arrangements of steps. The drawings are only for purposes of illustrating the preferred embodiments and are not to be construed as limiting the invention.

FIG. 1 schematically illustrates an example imaging system.

FIG. 2 schematically illustrates an example reconstructor that can be utilized with the imaging system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 schematically illustrates an example image de-noiser that can be utilized with the imaging system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 graphically illustrates convergence of an automatically determined regularization factor to a value corresponding to a predetermined quality metric.

FIG. 5 graphically illustrates a desired behavior for the convergence of the predetermined quality metric.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example method in accordance with at least one of FIG. 2 or 3.

The following generally relates to iterative reconstruction with regularization and/or image de-noising. As described in greater detail below, with the approach described herein, the regularization factor β is automatically determined and the user only has to provide a relative level of regularization (e.g., between 0% (i.e., no regularization, or unregularized) and 100% (i.e., full regularization)), even though the regularization factor β may vary from image to image and/or data set to data set. In one instance, this mitigates manual determination

of a suitable regularization factor β through trial and error each image and/or data set by a user and thus reduces the amount of time to reach a suitable regularization factor β and final image.

FIG. 1 illustrates an example imaging system **100**, such as a computed tomography (CT) scanner. The imaging system **100** includes a generally stationary gantry **102** and a rotating gantry **104**, which is rotatably supported by the stationary gantry **102** and rotates around an examination region **106** about a z-axis.

A radiation source **110**, such as an x-ray tube, is rotatably supported by the rotating gantry **104**. The radiation source **110** rotates with the rotating gantry **104** and emits radiation that traverses the examination region **106**. A one or two dimensional radiation sensitive detector array **112** subtends an angular arc opposite the radiation source **110** across the examination region **106**. The detector array **112** detects radiation traversing the examination region **106** and generates projection data indicative thereof.

A subject support **118**, such as a couch, supports an object or subject such as a human or animal subject in the examination region **106**. A general-purpose computing system or computer serves as an operator console **120**. The console **120** includes a human readable output device such as a monitor and an input device such as a keyboard, mouse, etc. Software resident on the console **120** allows the operator to interact with and/or operate the scanner **100** via a graphical user interface (GUI) or otherwise.

A reconstructor **114** reconstructs the projection data and generates image data indicative thereof. As described in greater detail below, in one instance, the reconstructor **114** employs an iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization and determines the regularization factor β for each iteration based on an image quality metric of the image generated for the current iteration and a predetermined regularization level of interest, which can be a default and/or user defined level. In one instance, the regularization factor is determined automatically.

An optional image de-noiser **116** de-noises images generated by the reconstructor **114** and/or other reconstructor, including a reconstructor employing a conventional filtered-backprojection reconstruction algorithm and/or other regularized or non-regularized based reconstruction algorithm. As described in greater detail below, in one instance, the de-noiser **116**, likewise, automatically determines the regularization factor β for a subsequent iteration based on an image quality metric of the current generated image generated for the current iteration and a predetermined regularization level of interest, which can be a default and/or use define level.

The reconstructor **114** and the image de-noiser **116** may be part of the same component, for example, a processing component **122**, as shown in FIG. 1, or separate and distinct components. It is to be appreciated that automatically determining the regularization factor β for either or both of the iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization or the image de-noising may enhance usability of iterative reconstruction algorithms with regularization and/or image de-noising, as a user does not have to know an absolute value of β , but rather just provides a relative level of regularization.

The reconstructor **114** and/or the image de-noiser **116** are implemented via a processor (or microprocessor, controller, etc.) executing one or more computer readable instructions encoded or embedded on computer readable storage medium such as physical memory. Such a processor can be part of the console **120** and/or other computing device such as a dedicated computer, and/or other computing device. The processor can also execute at least one computer readable instruc-

tions carried by a carrier wave, a signal, or other non-computer readable storage medium such as a transitory medium.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example of the reconstructor **114**.

An image updater **202** receives an initial image and processes the image using an iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization **204**. An example of such an algorithm is described in Fessler, "Statistical image reconstruction methods for transmission tomography," Handbook of Medical Imaging, Volume 2: Medical Image Processing and Analysis, pages 1.70, SPIE, Bellingham, 2000. For example, this reference discusses an approach for determining an estimate $\hat{\mu}$ of the true attenuation map by maximizing a penalized-likelihood object function of the following form:

$$\hat{\mu} \triangleq \underset{\mu \geq 0}{\operatorname{argmax}} \Phi(\mu),$$

where $\Phi(\mu) \triangleq L(\mu) - \beta \cdot R(\mu)$, Φ is the objective function, and $R(\mu)$ is a roughness penalty.

In the illustrated embodiment, the regularization factor, for the first reconstruction iteration, is set to an initial value of β **206**, which can be a predetermined default value and/or user defined, and can be a zero or a non-zero value. After such processing, the image updater **202** generates an image and likewise processes the generated image during a subsequent reconstruction iteration. In the illustrated example, the image updater **202** iteratively reconstructs a final image using a different updated value of β each reconstruction iteration.

An analyzer **208** receives the generated image after each reconstruction iteration and analyzes the received image based on one or more given quality criteria such as noise, artifacts, etc. The analyzer **208** generates a quality metric indicative thereof. The quality metric can be a single value or multiple values. Examples of quality metrics include, but are not limited to, a global or a local image noise standard deviation or variance. Other quantitative criteria may optionally be used. The analyzer **208** outputs the quality metric after each reconstruction iteration.

A β determiner **212** receives the quality metric of each generated image after each reconstruction iteration and determines the updated β for each next reconstruction iteration. The β determiner **212** includes a comparator **214** which compares the received quality metric of each reconstruction iteration with a predetermined quality set point **216** stored in memory **218**, determining a value indicative of an error or difference between the received quality metric and the predetermined quality set point **216** each reconstruction iteration.

If the quality metric satisfies the quality set point **216** (e.g., the quality metric is within a predetermined range or tolerance about the set point **216**), the β determiner **212** conveys a signal to the image updater **202**, which terminates the iterative reconstruction, and the image updater **202** outputs a final reconstructed image. Other stopping criteria may include the number of iterations, lapse a time duration, etc. Otherwise, a β updater **220** updates a current value of β **222**, and conveys the updated β to the image updater **202** for the next reconstruction iteration.

The set point **216** can be variously determined. For example, a set point determiner **224** determines the set point **216** based on lower and upper quality bounds **226** and a quality variable **228**, which indicates a level between the lower and upper quality bounds **226**. In one non-limiting instance, the upper bound is determined as the quality metric

of the initial unregularized image, and the lower bound is determined as the quality metric of a fully (or 100%) regularized initial image, which can be determined by fully regularizing the image or approximated without fully regularizing the initial image. The lower and upper quality bounds **226** can be normalized by the upper bound. Other approaches for determining the lower and upper quality bounds **226** are also contemplated herein.

The quality variable **228**, in this embodiment, represents a relative target level (e.g., expressed as a percentage or otherwise) between the lower and upper bounds **226** (e.g., 50% between the lower and upper bounds **226**). This relative target level can be determined and set by a user (e.g., a radiologist or other practitioner) or computer.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example of the image de-noiser **116**.

A de-noiser **302** receives an initial (e.g., a non-de-noised) image and de-noises the image based on a de-noising algorithm **304**. The initial image can be generated by the imaging system **100** or other system. A non-limiting example of a suitable de-noising algorithm with regularization is described in international (PCT) application serial number PCT/IB2011/054588, entitled "Low Dose CT De-Noising," filed on Oct. 17, 2011, and assigned to Koninklijke Philips Electronics N V (Eindhoven, NL), the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The de-noiser **302** uses an initial value of β **306** with the de-noising algorithm **304** to de-noise the received initial image. The initial value of β **306** can be determined as described herein for the initial value of β **206**. After such processing, the image de-noiser **302** generates a de-noised image. The de-noiser **302** may also further de-noise a generated de-noised image, if an image quality of the de-noised image does not satisfy an image quality of interest, as described below. In the illustrated example, the de-noiser **302** iteratively further de-noises the generated de-noised image using a different updated value of β each iteration.

The analyzer **208** and the β determiner **212** are as described in connection with FIG. 2.

That is, the analyzer **208** receives the generated image after each de-noising iteration and analyzes the received image based on one or more given quality criteria such as noise, artifacts, etc. The analyzer **208** generates a quality metric indicative thereof. The quality metric can be a single value or multiple values. Examples of quality metrics include, but are not limited to, a global or a local image noise standard deviation or variance. Other quantitative criteria may optionally be used. The analyzer **208** outputs the quality metric after each image de-noising iteration.

A β determiner **212** receives the quality metric of each generated image after each de-noising iteration and determines the updated β for each next de-noising iteration. The β determiner **212** includes a comparator **214** which compares the received quality metric of each de-noising iteration with a predetermined quality set point **216** stored in memory **218**, determining a value indicative of an error or difference between the received quality metric and the predetermined quality set point **216** each de-noising iteration.

Similarly, if the quality metric satisfies the quality set point **216** (e.g., the quality metric is within a predetermined range or tolerance about the set point **216**), the β determiner **212** conveys a signal to the image de-noiser **302**, which terminates de-noising, and the image de-noiser **302** outputs a final de-noised image. Likewise, other stopping criteria may include the number of iterations, lapse of a time duration, etc. Otherwise, a β updater **220** updates a current value of β **222**, and conveys the updated β to the image de-noiser **302** for the next image de-noising iteration.

In this example, the upper bound is determined as the quality metric of the initial (non-de-noised) image, and the lower bound is determined as the quality metric of a fully (100%) de-noised initial image, which can be determined by fully de-noising the image or approximated without fully de-noise the initial image. Likewise, the lower and upper quality bounds **226** can be normalized by the upper bound. Other approaches for determining the lower and upper quality bounds **226** are also contemplated herein.

In addition, the quality variable **228** can be set based on dose, which allows for dose reduction of the image for a given image quality. For example, where the practitioner is going to set the quality variable **228** at 50%, patient dose can be reduced four times for a given image quality, as the relationship between dose and noise can be determined. In another instance, the final image quality can be improved for a given patient dose. In yet another example, both image quality can be improved and dose can be reduced. Other approaches for determining the set point **216** are also contemplated herein.

A non-limiting approach for updating β each iteration, for either or both of the embodiments described in FIGS. 2 and 3, based on the quality set point **216** using proportional-integral-derivative (PID) control is shown in EQUATION 1:

$$\beta(k) = \beta(k-1) + 2P(e(k) + IE(k) + D\Delta e(k)), \quad \text{EQUATION 1:}$$

where $\beta(k)$ is the updated β for the next iteration, $\beta(k-1)$ is the previous updated β , P, I and D respectively are proportional, integrating and derivative constants for PID control, $e(k)$ represents the difference between the quality metric of the current iteration and the set point of the current iteration, $E(k)$ is the summation of $e(k)$ up to the k-th iteration, and $\Delta e(k)$ represents the change (i.e., $e(k) - e(k-1)$) of the difference between the quality metric and the set point between the (k-1)-th to the k-th iteration. In another embodiment, β can be updated using P, PI, and/or other control.

FIG. 4 graphically illustrates a non-limiting example of updating β over multiple iterations using a maximum likelihood reconstruction with a Huber penalty where the quality metric is the global noise level of the image.

A first y-axis **402** represents the quality metric range between the lower and the upper bounds **226**, normalized to the upper bound, a second y-axis **404** represents the value of β , and an x-axis **406** represents the number of reconstruction or de-noising iterations. For FIG. 4, a quality set point **408** is set to 50% between normalized upper and lower bounds (or 0.5). A quality metric curve **410** shows that the quality metric converges to the 50% point after approximately 500 iterations. A β curve **412** shows the value of β converges to and remains fairly constant at approximately 250 once the quality metric reaches the set point. This example is provided for explanatory purposes and is not limiting.

It is to be appreciated that the β updater **220** can optionally apply a set of updating rules for example, to mitigate under and/or overshoot of the quality metric. For example, FIG. 5 graphically illustrates an example target behavior **500** for the quality metric. In FIG. 5, a y-axis **502** represents the quality range between the lower and the upper bounds **226**, normalized to the upper bound, and an x-axis **504** represents the number of reconstruction or de-noising iterations. As shown in FIG. 5, the target behavior **500** includes an approximately linear region **506** (i.e., a linear decay with a fixed slope) until a set point **508** is reached to mitigate possible overshoot of the set point **216**. Other target behavior is also contemplated herein. This example behavior is provided for explanatory purposes and is not limiting.

FIG. 6 illustrates an example method in accordance with the embodiments described herein.

It is to be appreciated that the ordering of the acts in the methods described herein is not limiting. As such, other orderings are contemplated herein. In addition, one or more acts may be omitted and/or one or more additional acts may be included.

At **600**, an image is obtained for processing with an algorithm employing a regularization factor.

At **602**, the regularization factor is set to an initial value.

At **604**, the image is processed, for example, as described herein via an iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization or a de-noising algorithm, producing a processed image.

At **606**, a quality metric is determined for the processed image.

At **608**, the quality metric is compared with a quality set point and a difference value indicative of a difference between the quality metric and the quality set point is determined.

At **610**, it is determined whether an absolute value of the quality metric is within a predetermined range (e.g., $\pm a$ tolerance) about the quality set point. As described herein, the quality set point can be determined based on target level between a lower quality bound and an upper quality bound **226**.

If the quality metric is outside of the predetermined range, then at **612**, the regularization factor is updated as described herein and acts **604-610** are repeated with the updated regularization factor. If the quality metric is within the predetermined range, then at **614**, a final image is output.

The invention has been described with reference to the preferred embodiments. Modifications and alterations may occur to others upon reading and understanding the preceding detailed description. It is intended that the invention be constructed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

The invention claimed is:

1. A processing component that processes images based on an iterative reconstruction algorithm with regularization and/or de-noising algorithm, the processing component comprising:

a set point determiner that determines a quality set point between predetermined lower and upper quality bounds based on a quality variable indicative of an image quality of interest;

a comparator that compares, each processing iteration, a quality metric of a current generated image with the quality set point and generates a difference value indicative of a difference between the quality metric and the quality set point; and

a regularization factor updater that generates an updated regularization factor for a next processing iteration based on a current value of the regularization factor and at least the quality metric in response to the difference value indicating that the quality metric is outside of a predetermined range about the quality set point.

2. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the quality variable defines a relative target level between the lower and upper bounds.

3. The processing component of claim **2**, wherein the relative target level corresponds to a target image noise or artifact level reduction of interest.

4. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the upper bounds corresponds to a quality metric of the image before regularizing the image and the lower bounds corresponds to a quality metric of the image after fully regularizing the image.

5. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the lower bound is approximated without fully regularizing the image.

6. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the lower and the upper bounds are normalized by the upper bound.

7. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the regularization factor updater generates the updated regularization factor by one or more of multiplying the current value of the regularization factor by an update term, which is a function of the quality metric or by adding to the current regularization factor an update term, which is a function of the quality metric.

8. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the regularization factor updater generates the updated regularization factor based on proportional-integral-derivative control.

9. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the quality metric of an iteration is indicative of an image noise level of the generated image of that iteration.

10. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the quality metric of the iteration is indicative of a standard deviation of an image noise level of the generated image of that iteration.

11. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the quality metric of an iteration is indicative of an artifact level of the generated image of that iteration.

12. The processing component of claim **1**, further comprising:

a de-noiser that de-noises the image each iteration based on the updated regularization factor for the corresponding iteration.

13. The processing component of claim **1**, further comprising:

an image updater that updates the image each iteration based on the updated regularization factor for the corresponding iteration.

14. The processing component of claim **1**, wherein the regularization factor updater generates the updated regularization factor based on a predetermined behavior of the quality metric.

15. A method, comprising:

processing an initial image during a first processing iteration using an algorithm, which employs regularization, and an initial regularization factor, and generating a first image;

determining a first quality metric of the first image;

comparing the first quality metric of the first image with a quality set point and determining a difference value there between; and

generating an updated regularization factor for a subsequent processing iteration of the image in response to the first quality metric being outside of a predetermined range about the quality set point,

wherein the updated regularization factor is generated based on the initial regularization factor and the first quality metric, and the updated regularization factor is used to process the first image during the subsequent processing iteration and generate a subsequent image.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the quality set point is based on a user defined target percentage between a lower quality bounds and an upper quality bounds.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein the lower bounds corresponds to a quality value of the image before regularization and the upper bounds corresponds to a quality value of the image after full regularization.

18. The method of claim **16**, wherein the quality metric each iteration is indicative of an image noise level or an artifact level of the generated image each respective processing iteration.

19. The method of claim 15, further comprising:
generating an updated regularization factor each process-
ing iteration until the first quality metric is within the
predetermined range about the quality set point.

20. A processing component, comprising: 5
a component that processes an image using an iterative
algorithm employing regularization and generates an
image, wherein the iterative algorithm at least includes a
regularization term multiplied by a regularization factor;
an analyzer that generates a quality metric after each pro- 10
cessing iteration for a respective generated image; and
a regularization factor determiner that automatically gen-
erates an updated regularization factor for a next pro-
cessing iteration by the component based on a quality
metric of a generated image of a current processing 15
iteration and a predetermined quality set point for the
generated image.

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